**Empowerment**

Empowerment is defined as, to enable, to permit and to authorize. This can apply to ourselves or to others. You can empower others by words and actions. You can empower yourself in the same ways through self talk and experiences. Self empowerment may occur with education, money, work, satisfaction at work, social identity, with verbal exchange, self awareness, emotional freedom, emotional expression, spiritual freedom and creative expression.

There are many examples of empowerment. Empowerment with education is the completion of your education with a ceremony and diploma and perhaps a banquet following, with friends and family expressing their pride with cards and gifts. Work can be empowering if you have a job that allows you to do the work you were trained to do and you have positive results from it. Respect from your employer with positive feedback and pay that is equivalent to others in the same profession is also helpful. If you don’t have this in your work, keep looking. Earning money offers freedom to do many activities you may want to do and items you may wish to buy. This is empowering for many people. Having financial security is empowering.

Social identity occurs from many areas of life such as home, work, society, and spiritual practice. These are empowering sources for many people. With social identity, freedom of spiritual practice, friendships, other community groups and political choice all lead to empowerment in our society.

Self awareness, emotional freedom and emotional expression are areas of empowerment many people struggle with and its often through counselling that this area of empowerment materializes. There are many theories of counselling that help individuals to expand in these areas of human development. Art therapy can be a powerful means to self awareness. Through art medium and exploration comes a an authentic look at what is needed by the individual to allow awareness to surface. The whole process is empowering because the individual creating the art decides what they see in their art and what they wish to talk about. This becomes a gentle unveiling and non-threatening means to greater self knowledge.

Emotional freedom through art therapy is another step to self awareness. Emotional expression is often difficult in our cognitive society and art therapy leads to unconscious materials that can lead to emotional expression. Emotional expression is an authentic expression of the human experience. This can be a gift and lead to emotional freedom. Our emotions are a natural and normal expression for humans which we get cut off from and forget in our busy social and work interactions.

Art therapy in groups is a safe and effective way to explore experiences both cognitively, emotionally and spiritually. The art expression relates to experiences in the real world and leads to emotions that are often blocked in the real world and held back. The group gives people a safe space to explore their authentic experiences cognitively and emotionally and connect to others safely. This connection often becomes a spiritual experience. The whole process is empowering.

Irene Haire, MC, RCAT Registered Provisional Psychologist is in private practice in Edmonton at **The GB Building 200-9562- 82 Avenue** 780-232-1055 [www.edmontonpsychologistpros.com](http://www.edmontonpsychologistpros.com)